

STOKE NEWINGTON TWINS CLUB TIPS FOR TWIN BREASTFEEDING: Yes You Can Feed Two!

Helpful books- all these are recommended by our twin mums

Mothering Multiples: Breastfeeding and Caring for Twins Karen Kerkoff Gromada
(available from USA on Amazon.com) ISBN 0-912500-51-4

What to Expect When You're Breast-feeding...and What if You Can't Clare Byam-Cook
ISBN 009190696-2

TAMBA leaflet on breast-feeding see www.tamba.org.uk

- **What is the key to successful twin breastfeeding?**

It is extremely gruelling at the beginning but it is designed to work. You don't need to be superwoman! What you do need is the right advice and support and if possible to do the following crucial 6 things in the first week of life:

1. Read Chapters 1-3 of Clare B-C's book, also latching at p.100 and try and read both books listed above before the birth if possible
2. Lots of cuddles skin to skin as soon as you can after birth
3. Then latch them on for a bit of a suck as soon as you can after birth (doesn't matter if they can't take anything the first time, it is just to give them the idea!)
4. Get help latching them on, feed them one at a time until you feel confident
5. Keep offering them the breast every few hours, express and feed the babies from a syringe if they are too sleepy to take anything (see hand-expressing colostrum below)
6. Try not to give any formula before 8 weeks- avoid 'topping up'

- **Should I feed my twins together or apart?**

Feed them ONE AT A TIME at the beginning. It takes a bit of practice to put them on together- try one feed a day together and the rest separately.

- **Should I feed on demand or wake my babies?**

In the first week I fed completely on demand as it was impossible to wake either of them when they were asleep! But once they started to be slightly more lively I did the 'first to wake gets fed, then second is woken' method.

I waited until one woke up, fed that baby and then woke the other one if he/she was still asleep. You might find the second one starts to stir as you feed the first one and they will soon fall into a pattern of feeding one after the other.

- **Should I alternate breasts?**

I would recommend letting baby1 have breast 1 and baby 2 have breast 2, then alternate at the next feed (so baby 1 breast 2, baby 2 breast 1) to keep the milk supply even between breasts if one baby has a weaker suck than the other.

- **How can I get my twins in a routine and still breastfeed? I've read Gina Ford and it all sounds so much easier to get into a routine if you bottle feed.**

Breastfeeding is no barrier to routine! However, if you go 'Gina' on your babies in the first few weeks you may impede breastfeeding (and drive yourself potty). My advice is to chill out, go with the flow at first and then try the gentle routine below at around 10 weeks.

- **I think I might have to have a c-section, isn't it harder to breastfeed?**

No! It makes no difference to breastfeeding whether you have a natural birth or c-section. The placenta is removed during the section, which triggers all the right milk hormones so it will all happen naturally. Your milk may take slightly longer to 'come in' after a section but all you need to do is the cuddling and latching described above.

- **One or both of my twins are in special care, how can I breastfeed them?**

Read chapter 11 (Multiples in the NICU) of Karen Gromada's book, it is an excellent guide to breastfeeding prem babies.

Geri (prem twin mum and Chair of our twins club) also recommends *Your Premature Baby, 0-5 Years* by Nikki Bradford. Publisher: Frances Lincoln Publishers (paperback, 24 Aug 2000).

Express milk for your babies while they are in the NICU. Hire an industrial breast pump from one of the sources below:

NCT - Stoke Newington
Contact Lucilla on 0208 211 0888

Ardo Medical
01823 336 362

Next day delivery to your house and pick up once you are finished with it. Geri used their Ameda dual electric breastpump and would highly recommend either the SMB or Elite models.

- **The hospital midwives are telling me my twins need formula and my milk is not in yet, what can I do?**

Tell your midwife you want to hand-express colostrum for your babies and ask for their help in putting it into a syringe. Colostrum is tailor-made for your babies, particularly if they are ill or premature as it is chock-full of things to boost their immune system.

Many midwives are worried about twins perhaps because of small size or complicated delivery and will tell you that they need formula soon after birth. This is only necessary in very RARE circumstances- colostrum is by far the best thing.

- **People keep asking me when I'm going to give up breastfeeding and making negative comments about how hard it's going to be, maybe I should just take their advice and give up?**

Try not to listen to anyone who harps on about how hard it is unless they have had twins themselves. Tell people who are negative the following: "I'm sure you mean well but I'm determined to give it my best shot so I really need my friends to be positive and encouraging".

- **The Essential timescales: how long do I have to do this for?**

If you give up before 3/4 months, you will kick yourself! It is very hard work up until then as feeding two is very time consuming. After that magic point, you will find it much easier as your babies should settle into a 3-4 hour feeding pattern and go down around 7 in the evening until around late evening (e.g. 10.30pm). Then slowly but surely they will settle into only waking twice in the night, then once, then will come that magic night when they don't wake at all.

- **What is breastfeeding twins like once the feeding really kicks off?**

Here is what you can expect from a normal set of exclusively breastfeeding twins (assuming born at term with no developmental or health problems):

Age up to 8 weeks

Utter chaos in your house, feeding every two hours or even more often. In practical terms, that will mean you will feel that you are always feeding! But don't worry, THIS TIME PASSES. Go into a bubble with your babies, sleep when they sleep, feed them whenever they cry. Get other people to bring you a constant supply of your favourite foods. Join a dvd club so you can keep yourself awake with George Clooney while feeding. If you feel like your life has ended, tell yourself that this time will pass. Look forward to food and to people bringing your babies presents. Don't try to look too far ahead or worry that you should be out and about in your skinny jeans- there will be plenty of time for that.

Try and give yourself a treat once a week (beauty treatment in your own home, massage by partner, special food, anything that will cheer you up and is realistic). Mark the weeks

off on a calendar if you feel that you are really suffering. Remember 3 months is only 0.3% of an average entire life, all this will soon seem like the blink of an eye in terms of your life with your children.

8/10 weeks to 4 months- try a ‘gentle evening routine’

You should see a pattern emerging, with the babies feeding one after the other or together every 3 hours ish. Try bathing the babies around 7pm, breastfeeding them in their dim room with no distractions and putting them down to sleep. See if they give you a couple of hours peace before the next feed! If so, well done. If not, don't worry, give it a bit longer and then try again. If you persevere, they will eventually start sleeping for that bit of the evening at least, leaving you free to have a meal or a bath.

You should expect them to wake around 10.30ish for another feed and then probably twice more in the night. This is obviously very gruelling after even a short time so it is very important that you sleep during the day. Try to let your old timetable and habits go so that you are not wasting time pottering or doing chores when you could be sleeping. If you feel weird going upstairs to sleep then have a camp bed set up downstairs so that you can just lie down and get some kip whenever the babies go down. Let everything else go apart from feeding the babies and yourself and sleeping.

You will find that after feeds in the night it takes extra time to burp and change nappies before the babies go down for another couple of hours. Once your babies start to fall into some kind of pattern you could ask your partner to wake up once in the night to help you change and burp the babies to increase the amount of sleep you will get.

At four months you could also REPLACE one breastfeed with a bottle-feed to give you a rest (see ‘avoiding top-ups’). The 10.30pm feed is a good one to try replacing but I would keep your early evening ‘off to sleep’ feed and your middle of the night ones (sorry!) to keep up your supply. If you stop feeding in the middle of the night before the babies let you know they are ready, you will end up reducing your supply and giving yourself a whole load of hassle during the day with the babies getting fussy because there isn't enough milk.

TOP 10 TIPS

- Be well read up on breastfeeding before your babies arrive, it is very useful so that you don't get discouraged by negative comments by people who may be misinformed.
- Before the birth tell significant people who will be around you (partner, midwife, mother, mother in law, friends) that you are planning to breastfeed and that you need everyone to be positive and encouraging.

- Be strong and tell any midwives who are keen for your babies to have formula in hospital that you really don't want that, you know it will disrupt your milk supply and would rather express colostrum for them (see below).
- Find a breast-feeding mentor, ideally another twin mum who has exclusively breast-fed for at least 3 months and get them to support you in the early weeks. Try www.doula.org.uk for doulas who have supported twin breastfeeding mothers in the past. Or ask Geri about past twins club mums who could support you. Call me on 07811357376. I will be leaving London on 29 June but am always happy to chat about any feeding problems on the 'phone.
- Get a cleaner, someone to do your laundry if possible and ideally someone to make you food for the evenings, either your partner or someone else.
- Don't be discouraged by any negative attitude by midwives or health visitors visiting you at home after the birth. Most are lovely but some might not be that well informed about twin breastfeeding. Remember also health visitors can be overworked these days and under pressure to sign you off their books as they are very busy. They are only allowed to sign you off when your baby reaches their birth weight, so try not to be worried if they say your baby is not reaching their birth weight quickly enough. Talk it through with them and ask whether they have specific information about twins rather than singletons. Also talk to your local breastfeeding counsellor.
- Plan to breastfeed exclusively for the first 3 months and don't top-up.

Topping up after every feed with formula seems to be what is expected of twin mums! I would avoid this like the plague. It is a LOT of work, will wreck your milk supply and have you faffing about no end.

If you combine breast and bottle before 10-12 weeks you will end up giving up breastfeeding pretty fast. This is because you will be giving your breasts the message that less milk is needed because the babies will take less from the breast if they are having formula. Your breasts will react quickly to this by reducing production so that in turn your twins become fussy at the breast as not enough is produced. This is not the end of the world if you are intending to give up fairly quickly anyway but if you intend to breastfeed for 6 months or longer I would strongly advise avoiding top ups.

The better alternative if you are finding exclusive breastfeeding just too relentless is to replace one feed a day once you hit 3/4 months, which will allow you time off and allow your breasts to adjust to dropping a feed (see essential timescales above)

- **What are the twin mums power foods for breastfeeding?-**

Scoff for England, hurrah. You need plenty of protein for LUNCH not just dinner to get you through the day.

- Eggs on toast for breakfast
- Avocado for snacks
- Sardines on toast
- Fish, poultry and red meat
- Nuts-almonds are brilliant, cashews, pistachios (except peanuts)
- Protein shakes
- Full fat milk

Twin weight gain when exclusively breastfeeding 3months- 6 months

Get support if you are being told your twins are not putting on enough weight. There is virtually no data on normal weight gains for exclusively breast-fed twins. Even the new World Health Organisation breastfeeding charts only refer to singleton babies so do not worry if your babies don't follow the growth line (My son Christopher has never been on the chart and is still not at the healthy age of 1 year!). If your babies are content, fall asleep after feeds and are doing plenty of wet and pooey nappies they are generally fine unless a medical professional is strongly advising you that they are not thriving.

Try and see your local breastfeeding counsellor rather than the health visitors if you are exclusively breastfeeding and worried about weight gain as they are likely to be better informed. Ruth Tamir at Highbury Grange surgery in Highbury is a fantastic breastfeeding guru and does a free clinic once a week. Call 0207 2262462 for details.

Tash Baker 19 May 2008